



TITLE:

<Book Reviews>Tiantian Zheng, ed.  
Cultural Politics of Gender and  
Sexuality in Contemporary Asia.  
Honolulu: University of Hawai'i  
Press, 2016.

AUTHOR(S):

Datta, Arunima

---

CITATION:

Datta, Arunima. <Book Reviews>Tiantian Zheng, ed. Cultural Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Asia. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016.. Southeast Asian Studies 2018, 7(3): 512-514

ISSUE DATE:

2018-12

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/237258>

RIGHT:

© Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

constituent in Southeast Asia's economy and diplomacy. The normalization of bilateral relations of Southeast Asian states with China was achieved slowly—if not glacially in the case of Indonesia. This process contributed to the Cold War's erosion before the Berlin Wall's climactic fall. To this reviewer's eyes, he could have made a stronger argument that events in Southeast Asia signaled the end of the Cold War. A drastic change in the economic model in East Asia and Southeast Asia heralded a novel, globalized dawn that presaged much of the post-1989 world. Fleshing out this transformation could have brought readers more into the present to realize the contemporary purchase of Cold War-era diplomacy within Southeast Asia.

*Southeast Asia's Cold War's* narrow focus prevents readers from grasping the dense layers of local, regional, and international politics that intersected to shape diplomacy. Interstate relations are never conducted in a vacuum. Indeed, decolonization and the postcolonial project was an intoxicating milieu of culture, modernization, economics, diplomacy, Afro-Asian solidarity, war, and vast human destruction. Ang mostly avoids tallying the human toll, and at times readers are left with a sense that the titanic amount of death did not register as an influential dimension in the region's events. Notably absent was a fluid discussion of modernization and economics in Southeast Asia. The last few pages on economics in the final chapter, "Ending the Cold War Chasm," appear more as an afterthought rather than an element knitted into the book's analytical framework.

In spite of these critiques, the author has provided historians and area specialists with a laudable entry that scholars can expand upon and update. *Southeast Asia's Cold War* stands alone in the literature and will be a necessary guide for those who seek to view the region's politics from within. As geopolitics once more pivot toward influence over Southeast Asia, books such as this can help future scholars and policymakers see the contours of regional politics and the stakes for those who determine its future.

Brandon Kirk Williams

*Department of History, University of California, Berkeley*

### ***Cultural Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Asia***

TIANTIAN ZHENG, ed.

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016.

*Cultural Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Asia* is a provocative and timely publication which invites us to re-vision our understanding of sexuality, gender roles, and gender relations as performed, experienced, and perceived in Asia. The book brings together cultural, social, and economic contexts of Asia to show how gender and sexuality are not a "given" and cannot be understood or analyzed without understanding the contexts they are found in. Toward this end,

the chapters put forward a detailed analysis of how individuals engage with, negotiate, contest, resist and at times even transform configurations of gender and sexuality in various contexts. Readers can expect to take away two critical arguments from this volume: first, tradition is a perennially transient concept; second, the experience of gender and sexuality in the private or public space is never purely private or public.

The chapters focus on different spatial contexts, ranging from larger urban spaces and corporate spaces, to more specific niches like nightclubs and domestic spaces. In the process, the book also investigates the various aspects of gender relations through a myriad of intimacies: transactional intimacies, romantic intimacies, and homosocial intimacies. Also, this volume's contributions offer different lenses to investigate various forms of intersectionality of various factors which influence gender and sexuality ideas and experience in any given context. Two key elements of intersectionality explored by almost all chapters involve the influence of transnational mobility, and the influence of global economy on perceptions about sexuality and gender relations in Asia.

Chapters by Nana Okura Gagné, and Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo and Tracy Royce examine how men and women “voice” or perform their agency in transactional relations and spaces like clubs to negotiate, contest, resist and at times deconstruct mainstream views of gender roles and masculinities and femininities. Other chapters like the ones by Heidi Hoefinger, Tiantian Zheng, Xia Zhang reveal how men and women engage and transform ideas about migration, gendered work, and intimacy. These chapters help re-vision simplistic understandings of migration trends by illuminating the importance of intersections of various factors, which influence the way men and women engage with ideas of labor, intimacy, class, and migration. Essays by Ahmed Afzal, Madhura Lohokare, John Osburg, and Kevin Carrico, venture into the ideological battlefields of gender and sexuality, wherein ideas about “moral masculinities,” traditionalist views about gender roles, privileges (particularly leisure), and spaces are evoked. In their essays, they raise interesting arguments and insights about how certain individuals, who do not necessarily “fit” into the “traditional” and normative assumptions of gender and sexuality, engage with or reject such ideological constructs.

While each chapter focuses on different subjects, contexts, and spaces, they remain connected in their efforts to explore how individuals meet or negotiate social expectations for assumed gender roles and sexualities in their everyday lives. Simultaneously, all essays make readers aware of the crucial importance of local contexts, which intimately intersect with regional and global contexts, to influence the individuals' gender and sexuality experiences, roles, and opportunities. Above all, the volume brings to surface the everyday experiences of individuals with gender and sexuality within politically, culturally, and socio-economically transient spaces of Asia.

Despite the above-mentioned merits, however, this volume has a few fundamental shortcomings. While its title *Cultural Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Asia* might imply that it covers all regions of Asia, its contents are actually overwhelmingly East Asia-centric and

focus heavily on China. Out of the 12 essays, there are only 2 essays covering South Asia, 2 on Southeast Asia, and none on West Asia and Central Asia. Even while engaging with East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, it focuses on the “centers” of the respective regions and leaves out other equally relevant nations, like Korea, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, and others which could contribute to a more inclusive and comparative knowledge about gender and sexuality in Asia. This could have been achieved if there had been a more democratic selection of essays on Asian societies. To an informed reader, this will seem problematic, and arguably the first question that may come to mind is how the editor perceives Asia: does Zheng see China as the focal point of Asia? It is understandable that it is challenging to devote equal attention to all regions in such an edited volume. However, the volume could have instead chosen to focus on East Asia or China, and be titled *Cultural Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary East Asia/China*. A book like that would have also given the “space” for some valuable essays on China, and engaged the reader in various exciting contexts and ideas which were raised in this present volume but not adequately fleshed out.

Further, as is the case with any edited volume, certain chapters contain better arguments than others. While all essays do well to engage with issues of gender and sexuality ethnographically, I found the discussions concerning “neoliberalism,” “sexual field,” “modernity,” “whiteness,” and “morality” rather puzzling. The contributors of these chapters should instead have engaged more critically and analytically with these concepts within the contexts of their respective studies. Nonetheless, this book also includes more nuanced chapters which successfully tease out various textures hidden in concepts of “agency,” homosocial relations, spatial identities, and masculinity-femininity stereotypes.

These issues aside, *Cultural Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Asia* as a whole is informative and can be useful for teaching gender and sexuality classes, particularly those focused on contemporary China. Particular chapters on South and Southeast Asia can also be extracted to supplement texts in undergraduate-level courses.

Arunima Datta

*San Jose Evergreen Valley College, California*

### ***Imperial Intoxication: Alcohol and the Making of Colonial Indochina***

GERARD SASGES

Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2017.

*Imperial Intoxication: Alcohol and the Making of Colonial Indochina* traces political, economic, and scientific forces involved in the emergence of the alcohol regime in Indochina, its long lasting until